

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

### Questions to ask your local beach health monitoring official:

- Which beaches do you monitor and how often?
- What do you test for?
- Where can I see the test results and who can explain them to me?
- What are the primary sources of pollution that affect this beach?

### What to do if your beach is not monitored regularly:

- Avoid swimming after a heavy rain.
- Look for storm drains along the beach. Don't swim near them.
- If the waters of your beach have been designated as a no-discharge zone for vessel sewage, check to see if boat pumpout facilities are available and working.
- Look for trash and such other signs of pollution as oil slicks in the water. These kinds of pollutants may indicate the presence of disease-causing microorganisms that may also have been washed into the water.
- If you think your beach water is contaminated, contact your local health or environmental protection officials. It is important for them to know about suspected beach water contamination so they can protect citizens from exposure.
- Work with your local authorities to create a monitoring program.



## For More Information

For more information about beach water quality advisories, contact your local or state health or environmental protection department. You can find the telephone number in the blue section of your local telephone directory.

You may also contact:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Office of Water  
BEACH Program (4305T)  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20460

web address: [www.epa.gov/beaches](http://www.epa.gov/beaches)



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#### Cover photos

Top: Ocean City Beach by Tex Jobe, US Army Corps of Engineers  
Inset Photo: Gene Alexander, Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Bottom: Richard Frear, USEPA Great Lakes National Program Office



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# Before You Go to the Beach...





## Is the water safe for swimming?

The water at the beach looks clean, but is it? It may be worth your while to find out before you or your children go swimming. The water at most beaches is safe for swimming, most of the time. However, you cannot be sure the beach water is safe unless it is tested because your beach water may contain disease-causing microorganisms that you cannot see.

Monitoring of beach water quality by local health and environmental officials is necessary to warn citizens when there is a problem. With the passage of the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act on October 10, 2000, the Clean Water Act was amended to include significant new beach protection provisions. This new law authorizes a national grant program to assist state, tribal, and local governments in developing and implementing monitoring and public notification programs for their coastal recreation waters. It also requires states to adopt improved water quality standards for pathogens and pathogen indicators and requires EPA to conduct studies and develop improved microbiological water quality criteria guidance. In addition, the law requires EPA to develop performance criteria for monitoring, notification, and public information databases and requires other federal agencies to establish certain programs.

### How does beach pollution affect you and your family?

Water can be polluted by different things. Trash, such as picnic plates, plastic bags and bottles, and cigarette butts is easy to see. It is often the things we can't see, such as bacteria and other microorganisms, that we need to be more concerned about. If you or your family are exposed to these disease-causing organisms, they may make you sick.

Swimming or playing in unsafe water may result in minor illnesses such as sore throats or diarrhea.

It also might result in more serious illnesses that may last longer than your vacation at the beach! Children, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems have a greater chance of getting sick when they come in contact with contaminated water.



### Where does this pollution come from?

The most frequent sources of disease-causing microorganisms are sewage overflows, polluted storm water runoff, sewage treatment plant malfunctions, boating wastes, and malfunctioning septic systems.

Pollution in beach water is often much higher during and immediately after rainstorms because water draining into the beach may be carrying sewage from overflowing sewage treatment systems. Rainwater also flows to our beaches after running off lawns, farms, streets, construction sites, and other urban areas, picking up animal waste, fertilizer, pesticides, trash, and many other pollutants. Many of these pollutants can end up in the water at our beaches.

## BEACH Program

The BEACH Program will help reduce health risks to you and your family by minimizing your exposure to disease-causing microorganisms in the water where you swim or play. The BEACH Program is ensuring public access to information about the quality of their beach water. In addition, EPA is working with state, tribal, and local health and environmental officials to encourage use of faster tests to detect pollution as well as develop methods that will help predict when pollution may occur. With advance warning provided by the local authorities, you will be able to decide when and where to swim.

### How do I get information about my beach?

State, tribal, and local health and environmental protection officials are responsible for monitoring the quality of water at our nation's beaches. When they find a beach is contaminated they may post warnings or close the beach. Your local public health or environmental office can tell you if and when the water at your beach is monitored, who does it, and where the results are posted. Check with EPA's "Beach Watch" website at [www.epa.gov/beaches](http://www.epa.gov/beaches) or contact your city, county, or other local health officials listed in your local telephone book.

### Disease-Causing Microorganisms in Sewage

Microorganisms	Some Illnesses & Symptoms
<b>Bacteria</b>	Gastroenteritis (includes diarrhea and abdominal pain), salmonellosis (food poisoning), cholera.
<b>Viruses</b>	Fever, common colds, gastroenteritis, diarrhea, respiratory infections, hepatitis.
<b>Protozoa</b>	Gastroenteritis, cryptosporidiosis and giardiasis (including diarrhea and abdominal cramps), dysentery.
<b>Worms</b>	Digestive disturbances, vomiting, restlessness, coughing, chest pain, fever, diarrhea.